

Essa brings in large tax increase

By Richard Blanchard

Essa ratepayers will be seeing the largest tax increase in the municipal portion of their tax bill in recent years as township council passed its 2016 budget at a special meeting recently.

Councillors spent a little over an hour debating a variety of options before passing a budget which will the municipal portion of the residential portion increase about \$39.90 per \$100,000 of assessed value.

A house assessed at the value of \$275,000 would see a increase in the municipal portion of their taxes by \$109.

Combined with an increase in the county portion of two per cent and education tax increase expected to be around zero percent, total property taxes on a property valued at \$275,000 would be \$2,167, with the municipal portion at \$789 for 2016.

Councillors were quick to point out that Essa will likely remain with the second lowest rate among Simcoe county's 16 municipalities.

Councillor Keith White compared similar assessed properties in Barrie, Innisfil and Clearview and said that the taxes would be much more.

?They're almost twice as much for properties with similar assessed values in Barrie,? he said.

In a municipality where municipal tax increases have averaged between two and four per cent over the past decade, the size of this year's increase was caused by several factors.

Mayor Terry Dowdall said that the province continues to cut back on the grants payable to the Township.

?We have seen a decrease in the 2016 Ontario Partnership Fund of \$111,900,? he said.

?And Police Services and Fire Service costs have continued to be costly. Along with transportation and roads, they're about 70% of the budget.?

Also driving up the budget was the decision to purchase a new pumper truck for the fire department at a cost of \$524,400. Council debated whether to delay the purchase of the pumper truck for a year or to pay for it over a three year period but decided in the end to pay for it all this year.

In Essa, increased spending of \$40,000 translates to a one per cent tax increase.

Councillor Keith White said that he had no problems with the increase.

?It was the right thing to do. Honestly, I didn't want to do it. No one wants to put up taxes but I think that we did what had to be done.?